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CAPITOL SPOTLIGHT
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"ISRAELI CASUALTIES IN LEBANON MUST BE CUT"

It is absolutely imperative that the Israel Defense Forces take up new positions in Lebanon. We simply cannot tolerate the steadily mounting of casualty figures. Nearly 150 of the over 500 men killed in Lebanon were killed after the de facto cease fire.

The redeployment of Israeli troops would be, in the purely geographical sense, "a retreat". The troops would be moved to secure positions approximately 28 miles north of the Israeli border.

The new line would be identical to the line of defense envisioned when the war began last June.

At first glance, one would suspect that everyone would approve of the Israeli redeployment. However, the issue is quite controversial, both in Jerusalem and in Washington.

The main argument against redeployment is that it would symbolize permanent, rather than temporary, Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. According to this view, the current situation--with all its risks and uncertainties--represents an Israeli position in transition to full withdrawal.

I am not a prophet or visionary. I do, however, follow Middle East affairs closely. The length of the Israeli stay in Lebanon will not be determined by how the I.D.F. is deployed or by any other action taken by the Israeli government. The Israelis must remain in southern Lebanon until the Syrians and the P.L.O. implement a plan for their withdrawal.

To me, the argument that redeployment of the I.D.F. would signal Israeli unwillingness to withdraw from Lebanon, is altogether invalid. Israel has already reached a firm and specific agreement with the Lebanese Government for withdrawal. Israel has pressed for the extension of this agreement to a formal peace treaty, recognition, change of diplomats, etc. Only Lebanese reluctance has resulted in the limited agreement for withdrawal of forces.

In the Soviet Union and in Syria, there is absolutely no inclination towards peace in the broad sense or even towards partial troop withdrawal. In fact, the very opposite process is taking place. The Soviets have re-armed the Syrians. Syria has received the latest in

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Soviet missile equipment. It is the Syrians, not the Israelis, who have dug in for an indefinite period of time.

I can see no justification for Israelis allowing a war of attrition which brings daily reports of death and injury. The numbers may appear small to us Americans. We must always evaluate Israeli war loss in the context of that nation's tiny population.

According to the information I have seen, the plan of withdrawing I.D.F. troops to the Awali River will bring many gains. Most important, casualties will be reduced. Also, supply lines will be shortened. Hopefully, simpler and more defensible lines will reduce the economic costs of the war and, perhaps, even allow for the reduction in the total number of men on duty.

It is for the United States, as Israel's principal ally, to encourage immediate redeployment of the I.D.F. Israel's true friends and allies know how anxious this small country is to have all its troops returned to their families and to the domestic economy. It makes no sense to maintain ragged, risky lines through rough, mountainous territory just as a tangible symbol of Israeli intentions. Our friends need no such signal; our enemies will never interpret it honestly.

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